

LANDSCAPING

Make the landscaping on every site plan part of the larger open space system, incorporating natural features of the site, using native plants whenever possible, and connecting to the greenery patterns on adjacent parcels.

Landscaping is too often considered as decoration for the leftover edges after the site has been leveled and buildings and parking lots are designed. Standardized planting formulas, such as a line of junipers along the front, are primarily intended to screen or hide the ugliness of the parking lot and even the proposed buildings.

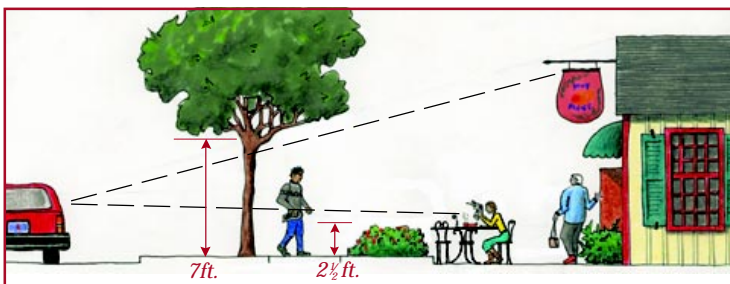
Good landscaping works with the architecture to enhance the site, not hide it. Plantings should be designed to reintegrate the developed property into its surrounding natural system.

Landscaping benefits go well beyond appearances:

- absorbs dust and air pollution
- reduces wind velocities
- dampens noise levels
- moderates temperatures (10-15 degrees cooler in wooded areas)
- reduces soil erosion/storm runoff
- filters water supplies
- provides bird and wildlife habitat
- increases property values



This restaurant in Rhinebeck replaced the front parking lot with attractive landscaping, outdoor seating, and a stone monument sign, putting its parking to the side behind a berm and street trees.



Overhead street trees along frontage, combined with low plantings, focus attention of passers-by on storefronts.

The very term “landscape” cannot be described within the property lines of a single parcel. Site plans, therefore, need to establish connections to the street and surrounding area. In centers the cultivated landscape usually involves more formal layouts with consistent setbacks, front yards that flow down blocks, and regularly spaced street trees and sidewalks to define the street edges. In outlying rural areas the landscaping forms become more organic, relating to natural topography, woodlands, open meadows, wandering paths, and plants in more informal groupings. In all cases plantings on the site need to respond to the surrounding landscape patterns, regional climate and soil conditions.



Typical shopping center with minimal landscaping exposes large parking lot and pole sign.



New supermarket in Hyde Park features a low wooden sign and a 150-foot wide natural landscape as part of a continuous open space system with stone wall frontages approaching the Franklin D. Roosevelt Historic Site.

General Landscaping Principles:

- Establish an open space system for each site, connected to the surrounding natural or landscaping patterns.
- Shape the site plan to take full advantage of existing natural features, such as mature trees, rock outcrops, slopes, stone walls, or streams.
- Set minimum open space guidelines for landscaping/permeable surfaces (can range from 10% in city centers to 75% in rural residential areas).
- Use low maintenance native plants when possible to reinforce the character of the region.
- Stress plantings along the public frontage, especially street trees and continuous landscaping to reinforce the flow of the street and bridge gaps between buildings.
- Encourage a diversity of plant species and combine trees with low plantings to provide contrasting forms.
- Use landscaping to frame views of architecture or open vistas.
- Generously landscape parking lot edges and dividing islands with shade trees and low plantings (Hyde Park and Pawling require at least one 3-inch diameter tree for every 10 spaces and 15% landscaped area within the perimeter of large lots).
- Include enforceable maintenance requirements in permit approvals.



Unightly views, such as rear storage areas, can be screened with natural combinations of evergreens and low plantings or berms.

Sources:

Gary O. Robinette, *Local Landscaping Ordinances*, 1992

Urban Land Institute, *Value By Design: Landscaping, Site Planning and Amenities*, 1994

SIGNS

Integrate signs into their site by using building signs as accessory elements within high quality architecture and embedding any freestanding signs into the overall landscaping.

Signs often form the first and lasting impression of a place. Effective and attractive signs are especially important in areas where the economy benefits from outside visitors. Since they must provide instant information from moving vehicles, overly complex signs or cluttered groupings are a dangerous distraction to drivers. Allowing signs to compete by being bigger, brighter, and more garish than their neighbors is a self-defeating spiral toward an ugly streetscape that just repels potential customers. Everyone wins when cities and towns instead encourage competition for the most creative signs, designed to be eye-catching because of their distinctive qualities, not because they dominate the site or block views of adjacent buildings.

Signs Should Not Shout

Sign standards cannot regulate content, but can limit size, location, number of signs and even the number of words, all in the interest of traffic safety and a legitimate concern for community appearance. Fewer words and colors are best (suggested maximum of 6 words and 3 colors), combined with a symbol or logo for quick recognition. Sign variances should not be granted lightly, only under unique conditions and when minimal exceptions will not be undesirable to the character of the community.

A good sign passes three tests:

*It conveys its message clearly and quickly;
It compatibly fits within the structure and its surroundings;
It promotes the visual image of the entire community.*



Natural looking materials are preferred, including wood and metal signs with stone, masonry, or landscaped bases.

Dark backgrounds with light lettering are recommended.

They are much easier to read and, if internally lit signs are allowed, cause far less glare.



Certain distracting signs should not be allowed and existing ones phased out over a set time period, such as flashing, moving or glaring signs, roof signs, and portable or reader board signs.



This monument-style sign proves that franchise outlets will conform to community standards if local boards stand firm.



Too many signs, including one blocking the sidewalk, create visual chaos and detract from the entire area.

Building Signs, including wall and window signs, projecting signs, and awnings, should be subordinate features, framed within interesting architecture. Signs too often overwhelm the structure and obscure architectural details, but when architecture and signs work as a complementary arrangement, the entire building becomes a sign of quality.



An excellent wall sign and a projecting picture sign combine with adjacent awnings and storefront signs to create a diverse, inviting, and historically compatible streetscape at a pedestrian scale.



Encourage awnings in traditional forms and canvas-like materials to add color and depth to storefronts and provide shelter and shade to sidewalks.



A clash of conflicting wall and window signs allows none of these village storefronts to stand out. Limit window signs to under 20 percent of glass area.



Plastic, metal, and vinyl awnings are generally inappropriate and should not be used to provide excessive sign area, especially when internally lit at night.



Buildings should not be allowed to have roof lines and false facades primarily designed to emphasize overly large signs on bland boxes.



A unique and attractive sign, large enough to be seen, yet low enough to complement its landscaped setting.

Freestanding signs are only needed when buildings are set back too far from the street for signs to be seen. Otherwise, and especially in centers, building signs are sufficient and separate freestanding signs should be avoided. Low, monument-style freestanding signs are recommended over taller pole or pylon signs because ground-based signs can be better integrated with landscaping. At 4 to 7 feet high, they can also be directly seen from the eye level of drivers and are less likely to obstruct views of neighboring properties or the sky.

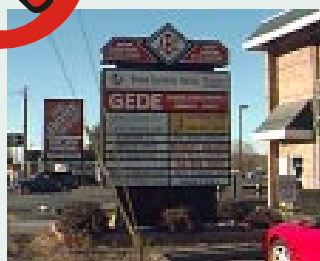
Large, off-premise signs mar the landscape and should be removed. Billboards can be phased out according to time limits in state law, with exceptions for industrial zones and along certain federal highways.



The effectiveness of any landscaping effort along the frontage is clearly degraded by dominant pole or pylon signs in overly bright colors.



Reader boards should be discouraged because they add too many extra words and secondary signs as they multiply down the road. Signs should be used primarily for identification, not advertising.



Directory signs with multiple listings are distracting and are not safely read from the road. Grouped businesses should be limited to wall signs and one freestanding sign identifying the plaza or building with, if deemed necessary, at most 3 or 4 individual names.

PARKING LOTS

Treat parking strictly as an accessory use, with parking lots to the side and rear of buildings and featuring quality landscaping and architecture along the frontage, not views of asphalt.

Individually, cars are shiny and colorful, much admired for their streamlined shapes. So why are parking lots, full of sleek cars, so uniformly ugly? Lots of cars become masses of metal, clashing colors, crammed in rows like all the frustration of traffic congestion congealed. And how did the word “park” become linked with these asphalt lakes of encrusted oil? Asphalt lots are anti-earth, repelling greenery, summer sticky hot and winter icy slick. Whose fault is all this asphalt, and why are we herding all our cherished cars into these ever-expanding tar pits surrounding every building?

Put the Park in Parking

Parking can complement the building and street if it does not visually dominate the site. People often meet where they park their cars, so include places to casually talk out of the flow of traffic. Well designed and landscaped sites will yield more long-term value than the original investment, increasing financial returns for developers 5 - 15% according to a 1994 Urban Land Institute study.

- **Instead of empty lots, build parking groves and parking courts**, with a significant number of shade trees and surrounded by low hedges, stone walls or attractive fencing.
- **Divide the rows with planting strips and tree islands**, averaging a tree every 6 to 10 spaces.
- **Set landscaping guidelines for the interior of lots**; the zoning for Pawling and Hyde Park require at least 15% of the inside area for larger lots to be landscaped with trees and other plants.
- **Insist on a continuous landscaping treatment along any frontage** with street trees and low plantings and denser evergreens or fencing along residential neighbors.
- **Break up the blacktop and reduce water runoff** by using bricks, pavers, or textured surfaces for crosswalks and stalls, with grass block overflow areas.



Artist: Robert Irwin. Computer Image: John Bacz

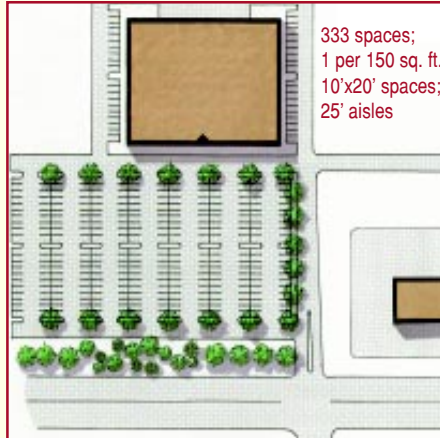
Dia Center for the Arts in Beacon has proposed a distinctively landscaped parking grove with three types of flowering trees that promise abundant shade and an enticing entrance area.



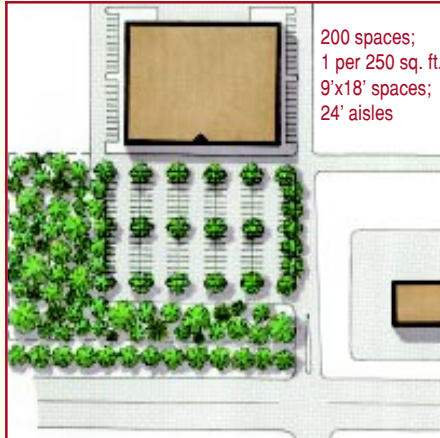
Diamond shaped tree islands 6 feet wide provide a shade tree every 4 to 6 stalls, without losing a single parking space. Planting islands with gaps in the curbs can allow natural drainage of stormwater.

Less Wasted Spaces

A Case Study



This proposed 50,000 sq. ft. retail store would have required 333 spaces, based on outdated, overscaled parking standards.



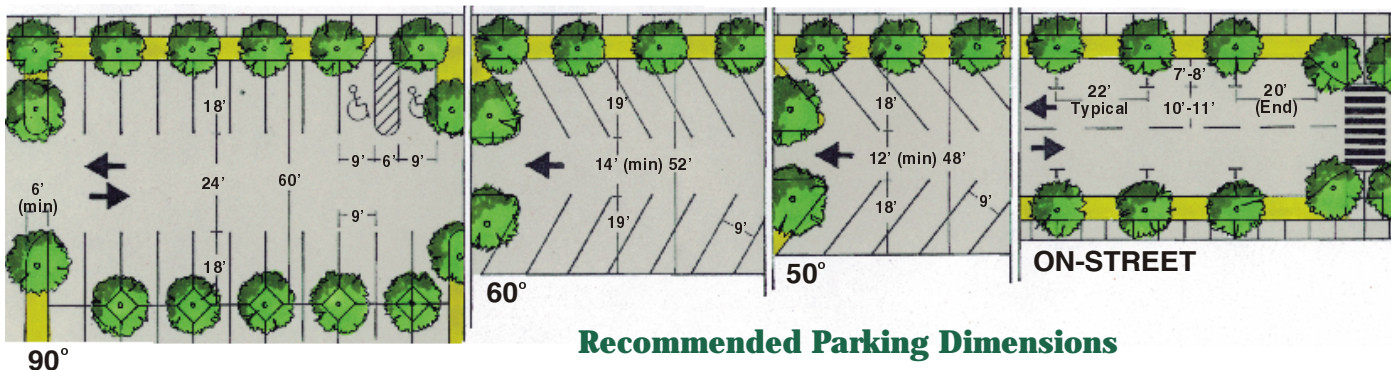
The asphalt area can be cut in half by simply using current National Parking Association and the Urban Land Institute recommendations.



Breaking up the parking into two smaller lots allows the architecture and landscaping to frame the public view. In town centers, smaller stores with sidewalks can now fit along the frontage to further screen the parking lots.

Surface parking covers 60% of most suburban shopping centers and office sites. Outdated zoning laws often require parking lots with twice as much parking area as needed on a typical day, thus reducing building and landscaping potential on a parcel. Smaller, more flexible parking standards can emphasize architecture over asphalt and increase tax revenues from new infill businesses, as well as reduce stormwater pollution and help heal ugly gaps between buildings. And remember, there is no such thing as free parking. Each surface space costs \$50 per month on average to build and maintain, so smaller lots mean more available money for higher quality landscaping and site improvements.

- **Keep car places small**, breaking up large lots and encouraging shared parking between adjacent uses;
- **Put parking lots behind the building lines**, featuring instead fine architecture and front yard landscaping;
- **Add convenient on-street parking**, whenever possible, to count toward parking requirements and reduce lot sizes;
- **Encourage flexibility**; several localities, including the Town of Clinton and the Village of Fishkill, allow boards to waive up to half the required spaces for a trial period, rather than build more spaces than needed;
- **Use updated parking requirements** with efficient stalls and aisle sizes and current use standards (see below).



Recommended Parking Dimensions

Sources:

Mark Childs, *Parking Spaces*, 1999

Anton Nelessen, *Visions for the New American Dream*, 1993

Richard W. Willson, *Suburban Parking Requirements*, *Journal of the American Planning Assoc.*, Winter 1995

LIGHTING

Make street and commercial lighting distinctive and human-scale (10-15' high) in central places, while preventing excessive glare or wasted light into the night sky.

Attractive site and street lighting extends the viability of centers and commercial uses, makes public areas feel more secure, and promotes entertainment activities after the primary work day. But existing lighting often features uniform fixtures on overly high poles, broadcasting much of the light on neighboring properties or into the night sky.

Common Lighting Problems:

Glare	too bright; shines off the site or into drivers' eyes
Energy Loss	inefficient costs; wasteful lighting of surrounding area
Color	certain fixtures create an unattractive blue-green or yellow glow
Sky Glow	lighting up the night sky, washing out view of the stars

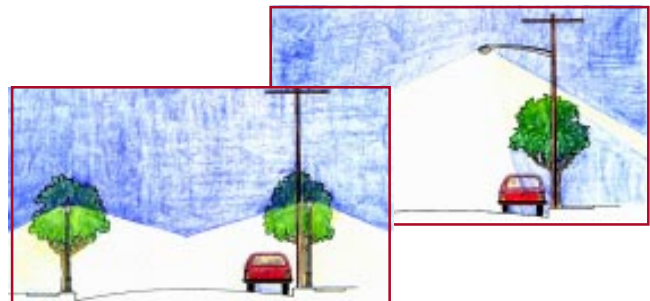


Excessive lighting: gas station lighting should be focused under the canopy with recessed fixtures to avoid off-site glare.

A dark-sky advocacy group estimates that over one billion dollars is wasted every year in the United States polluting the heavens with light and depriving everyone's view of the night sky. Under clear conditions, roughly 2,500 stars and the Milky Way are visible; on the same night city residents might only see 25 or so scattered stars. Fixtures that focus all light on the intended area and allow no light into the sky can save considerable money and bring back the stars.



Good lighting design can make a place dazzle, entice, or softly glow, highlighting the building and the street without obscuring the night sky.



High fixtures broadcast light over the road, but often cast shadows on sidewalks; historic quality and pedestrian scale fixtures focus light on streets, sidewalks, and storefronts.

Lighting Guidelines:

- Provide adequate brightness for the intended task, but do not over-light; manufacturers can provide standards.
- Include full shielding that eliminates glare, especially off-site, with no light above the horizontal level into the night sky.
- Avoid mercury vapor and low pressure sodium fixtures, as well as laser lighting or searchlights for advertising purposes.
- Encourage lighting that accents distinctive architectural features, but discourage exterior neon or illuminated banding that is primarily for advertising purposes.
- High pressure sodium is most efficient for highway lighting; metal halide is preferred for pedestrian areas to give better color quality; incandescent bulbs can be used for low wattage (under 150) accent/specialty lights.
- Main street and pedestrian area lighting should be human-scale (10 - 15 feet high); parking lot fixtures need not exceed 15 - 20'.
- Outdoor signs should be lit from the top; if internally lit signs are allowed, dark backgrounds and light lettering produce less glare and are easier to read.
- Space between fixtures should be approximately four times the height.
- Exceptions may need to be considered for stadium lighting and other specialty activities, short-term events, and tree lighting or other decorative bulbs under 50 watts.

Poor



Ground-mounted sign floodlights

Good



Top-mounted fixtures focus light on sign



Post lamp that broadcasts light



Post lamp that directs light down



Typical yard light



Wall light with reflector

Outdoor Lighting Options	Maximum Hours	Color	Comments
Incandescent	not efficient (3,500 hours)	full spectrum white light	attractive low wattage accent lighting; halogen version used in stadiums
Mercury Vapor	efficient	blue-green hue	rarely recommended, often prohibited
Low Pressure Sodium	efficient (18,000 hours)	orange glow	makes everything look yellow or gray; narrow spectrum favored by astronomers
High Pressure Sodium	very efficient (24,000 hours)	yellowish cast	Best where light distribution is valued more than appearance, such as highway lighting
Metal Halide	efficient (20,000 hours)	clear white light	best for pedestrian and retail areas; products look good and parking lots feel brighter, safer

Sources:

James Bradley, *City Lights*, Metropolis, April 1996

Town of Rhinebeck, *Design Standards*, 1999

Ulster County Planning Board, *Planners Memorandum: Outdoor Lighting*, 1998

STREET TREES

Plant continuous rows of street trees between the roadway and sidewalk in developed areas, as well as trees along rural roads to create green corridors through the countryside.

Create a canopy of roadside trees

Trees have long been used in Dutchess County to define the edges of both rural roads and city streets, providing windbreaks for farmland and shade for village sidewalks. Too often these days the tangle of utility wires takes priority over trees, or for the sake of wider roads and higher speed traffic, roadside trees are cut down while utility poles remain. Trees should be placed close to the road and each other to create a park-like canopy.



Mill Street looking East, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Street trees also:

- clean the air by absorbing polluting gases (carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, ozone)
- provide shade to lower summer temperatures;
- visually unify the varied architecture, parking lots, and setbacks along streets;
- help slow down traffic by narrowing the field of vision from highway proportions;
- give a sense of protection from traffic for walkers on the sidewalk; and
- increase adjacent property values (homes by an average of 5 to 10 percent).



Residential streets with large setbacks and no street trees look so wide that they induce higher speeds.



Narrower residential streets lined with trees provide a pedestrian scale and sense of enclosure to help slow traffic.

Street trees along a main commercial street are perhaps the single most effective physical addition to make sidewalks seem welcoming and more walkable. Trees placed between the sidewalk and curb form a protective row to make walkers feel safely separated from traffic.

Trees should be spaced close together: 20 - 30 feet in centers with slow speed limits and farther apart (30 - 40') and slightly back from the road in higher speed situations.

In rural areas trees along the road can be in more naturalistic patterns, although many farm lanes in Dutchess County were traditionally lined with rows of maples. A shift in street trees close to the road is an excellent way to mark the entrance to a village, hamlet, or school zone and help reinforce slower speed limits.



Street trees in the Village of Rhinebeck not only shade the sidewalk, they give a sense of visual enclosure that helps slow traffic. Street trees can also hide the view of overhead utility wires.



A barren concrete median provides no relief along this six-lane section of Route 9 adjacent to the Samuel F.B. Morse Historic Site.



This new section of Route 55 features brick pavers and street trees, which when fully grown will create an attractive boulevard quality and reduce the apparent width of the road.

Sources:

Gary Moll and Sara Ebenreck, *Shading Our Cities*, 1989

American Forests and National Association of Home Builders, *Building Greener Neighborhoods: Trees as Part of the Plan*, 1995
